

Congresswoman NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

Representing New York's 12th Congressional District
Ranking Democratic Member, House Small Business Committee



Hopes to Re-open Chinatown's Park Row & Boost Visits

At a rally in Chinatown, Congresswoman Velázquez spoke out to show her support for the re-opening of Park Row.

"Chinatown is a vibrant economic and cultural center – I will do everything in my power to help get people back into this area," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "The closure of Park Row has made a bad economic situation even worse for area small businesses. Visitors are less inclined to come here due to street closures and loss of parking. That is why I sought \$750,000 in federal funding to help alleviate these parking problems."

The closure of Park Row has increased emergency response times putting residents at risk, and increased traffic leading to compromised pedestrian safety, while raising air and noise pollution levels.

Recently, the Chinatown community won a lawsuit in an effort to re-open Park Row. Under the ruling, issued by State Supreme Court Justice Walter B. Tolub, the New York Police Department (NYPD) must complete an environmental impact study of the street closure within 90 days or be forced to remove the barriers erected in Chinatown.

"This decision is a big win for the residents of Chinatown who were not consulted when the barriers were put up – even though it was their lives that were



Congresswoman Velázquez speaks out in support of re-opening Chinatown's Park Row during a press conference.

impacted most," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "The Chinatown community stood together and was heard with one voice, and it was this solidarity that won the lawsuit."

Velázquez Continues to Fight for NYC's Small Businesses

Congresswoman Velázquez, Ranking Democratic Member of the House Small Business Committee, made key changes to the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Disaster Loan Program to aid small businesses in NYC still suffering from the events of 9/11 and the sluggish economy.

"In just two months we will observe the two year anniversary of September 11," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "It has not been an easy two years here. Throughout the city, business owners were faced with unprecedented business losses, unemployment, factory closings and infrastructure obstacles. While there were many small businesses that received some assistance, given the economic situation, they continue to struggle."

A program that provided financial relief to New York City small businesses post September 11 was the SBA's Disaster Loan Program. This program approved approximately 5,700 loans totaling about \$475 million in the New York City disaster area. But some of those small businesses that did receive SBA loans are now carrying debt and trying to survive in a weak economy.

In an effort to help these businesses, Congresswoman Velázquez included a provision in the SBA reauthorization for loan deferment. This would require the SBA to suspend borrower loan payments for between 2 and 5 years if the business would suffer substantial economic injury by repaying the loan. Business owners would then benefit from a cash infusion, without having to worry about the debt dragging down their enterprise or accruing interest on their loan.

"The SBA's Disaster Loan Program was important to providing capital and stabilizing businesses in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "What we are finding now, though, is that due to the war with Iraq, the SARS scare and a weakened economy, businesses are still hurting, with many just a few months away from closing their doors. These changes will give



Congresswoman Velázquez speaks at City Hall regarding NYC small businesses.

small business owners the time they need to get their businesses back on track."

It is the hope of Velázquez, as the legislation works its way through the process, to turn this deferment provision into an outright grant proposal in the final bill, which will be considered by Congress sometime this fall.

Velázquez Amendment Provides Funding for Housing

Funding was successfully increased by \$150 million for the Section 8 voucher program, targeted to low-income families, the elderly and the disabled, in an amendment offered by Velázquez to the VA-HUD appropriations bill. This bill failed to renew 85,000 of these vouchers.

“Unemployment is up, the markets are down and housing costs continue to rise,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The need for housing assistance is skyrocketing across the nation and homelessness is at a ten-year high. In fact, the housing crisis is so bad in New York City that low-income families were actually housed in jail cells.”

For the last several years, the budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has experienced deep cuts to its Section 8 voucher program. In the last year of the Clinton administration, 79,000 new Section 8 housing vouchers were appropriated. When President Bush took office, that number dropped to 18,000 and in FY 2003, no new vouchers were appropriated. As a result of this chronic underfunding, only one-fourth

of low-income households that are eligible for vouchers receive any federal housing assistance.

The Congresswoman’s amendment, which she sponsored with Congressman Jerrold Nadler, would offer some relief by providing an additional \$150 million to protect nearly 22,000 vouchers jeopardized in the VA-HUD federal spending bill.

“We are all well aware that the Republican tax cuts would put us in such a budget crisis that funding for all low-income programs would be on the chopping block,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “But I never thought that we would be standing here today voting on funding that actually cuts current Section 8 assistance for 85,000 families, and will likely lead to their eviction.”

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program is one of the most successful federal rental programs. It provides vouchers that allow families the flexibility to receive government subsidized rental housing in the private market. By using the Fair Market Rent in each locality, tenants pay only 30 percent of their income toward housing, with the voucher making up the difference. In New York City, there are approximately 105,000 vouchers serving more than 200,000 residents.

Fight to the Finish for Head Start Funding

Congresswoman Velázquez spoke on the House floor in opposition to the School Readiness Act of 2003 (H.R. 2210) because of its threat to the future of the Head Start program in New York.

“The work we do here in Congress is all about priorities – and the decisions we make are a measure of what we value as a nation,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “What this bill shows us very clearly is that low-income children are again not a priority for our president and the Republican leadership.”

Currently, there are over 3,000 children enrolled in 30 Head Start programs in Rep. Velázquez’s district. Almost 90 percent of those children are living in families that receive public assistance or have incomes below the federal poverty line.

In addition to early childhood opportunities, these children receive important medical and social services through Head Start. In fact, 97 percent of Head Start children that live in the Congresswoman’s district receive health care and 96 percent have a continuous source of dental care through their services. This program has also provided mental health

services to hundreds of local children as well as assistance to children with disabilities.

The changes put forth by this legislation would cause children and families to lose the federal guarantee that provides early education programs, medical and dental care, mental health assessments and other services. By favoring a “block grant” approach, which fails to designate funding for specific Head Start services, the program could be easily eliminated.

“I am outraged by this bill, but I am not surprised,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The Republican leadership constantly praises family values, yet its legislative agenda so clearly fails to value American families. This legislation jeopardizes funding, slashes critical health services, weakens educational standards, and repeals civil rights protections.”

For almost 30 years, the Head Start program has assisted low-income preschool children and their families, establishing a comprehensive early-learning environment and assisting children and families with a variety of medical and social needs that affect educational performance. The program has provided services to over 20 million children nationwide since its inception in 1965.

Grants Workshop Offers Advice on Obtaining Funding

A free grants workshop geared towards developing winning proposals and accessing funding was recently hosted by Congresswoman Velázquez. Joining the Congresswoman to provide their expertise on grant writing and funding sources were officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the New York City Department for the Aging, and the Foundation Center.

“The federal deficit is rising and we face serious funding shortfalls at all levels of government,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “That is why it is now more important than ever to find creative ways for local organizations to finance their programs so they can, in turn, continue to provide valuable social, educational, and cultural services to our communities.”

The Office of Congresswoman Velázquez supports a grants program which includes a bimonthly

grants alerts newsletter and urgent e-mail announcements, as well as grants workshops throughout the 12th district so that area organizations are able to tap into these important resources.

During the workshop, Barbara Andrews from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services discussed how to search -- and apply -- for grant opportunities. Judy Johnson of the New York City Department for the Aging gave an overview of the New York City grant solicitation and review process. The final presenter, Erika Wittlieb of the Foundation Center, walked participants through writing successful proposals for foundation grants.

“We must work together during these difficult times to provide the residents of our communities with the services they need,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “It is organizations like yours that make a real difference in people’s lives. Now we need to make sure you have the funding to accomplish what you set out to do.”

Grants Awarded to our Community

New York Community Trust		U.S. Dept. of Transportation -- Federal Transit Administration	
*University Settlement Society of New York	\$40,000	*Metropolitan Transportation Authority in NYC	\$13,278,362
For rent assistance and case management for low-income and immigrant families		For a project providing commuter service	
*Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project	\$50,000	U.S. Dept. of Justice -- Office of Justice Programs	
To support the project's work by heightening awareness of predatory lending		*New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services	\$7,661,500
*NYU Downtown Hospital	\$50,000	For development of a project in the juvenile justice system	
To train nurses to better assist elderly patients.		U.S. Dept. of Justice -- Office of Justice Programs	
*Friends and Relatives of Institutionalized Aged (FRIA)	\$40,000	*New York City Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project	\$300,000
To train family members to be advocates		For the Violence Against Women Office Technical Assistance Program	
*Nursing Home Community Coalition of New York State	\$50,000	Universal Service Administrative Company	
To help the coalition develop a manual to improve the training and management of nursing staff		* Mary Help of Christians School	\$23,565
		For internal connections for Internet service	